Joint Commission Resources

Infection Control

7 Essential Activities for Effective Infection Control

COVID-19 is highly transmissible and has a high mortality rate. With the entire population susceptible, it's critical for health care organizations to do everything possible to control its spread.

An effective infection control program aims to prevent infection transmission; protect staff, patients, and visitors; and identify, isolate, and treat infected individuals. As organizations implement and fine-tune their protocols and procedures for COVID-19, they will be better prepared for future emergencies.

1 **Designate a single source of truth within the infection prevention department or medical staff.**

– Rely on key staff to interpret, monitor, and update the latest scientific findings and most relevant guidelines and recommendations for screening and treatment. With novel viruses such as COVID-19, practitioners are constantly learning new things about the virus's behavior, transmission routes, and pathology. It is crucial to keep all staff members up to date.

2 **Make changes to daily routines to promote hygiene and implement source control measures:**

– Screen individuals for symptoms before they enter the organization. Health care personnel with symptoms should be sent home and asked to follow their occupational health protocols. Patients should be placed in designated isolation areas to await further evaluation.

– Continue screening patients throughout their hospital stay.

– Apply appropriate source control measures, including physical distancing of at least six feet, to reduce transmission. Visitors and patients should wear their own face masks or be provided face masks upon entry. Health care personnel should use face masks as a measure of source control while in the facility. For areas with moderate to high levels of community transmission or anticipated exposure in low transmission areas, staff should use eye protection as well and take standard infection prevention and transmission precautions. Use N95 or equivalent type respirators during aerosol-generating procedures and for surgeries with a higher risk of transmission.

– Educate staff on the proper use of PPE, particularly on donning and doffing procedures.

– Think creatively about ways to protect your environment (for example, redesigning patient placement plans and shared/congregating spaces or installing plumbed sinks and shoe cleaning stations directly outside of entrances for use by staff, patients, and visitors).

– Remember that while source control interventions reduce transmission, they do not prevent it. Hand hygiene, the only method to prevent transmission, remains a best practice. Maintain an adequate supply of soap and antibacterial solutions. If necessary, partner with local suppliers that manufacture these supplies in nontraditional environments such as distilleries.

3 **Manage the supply of resources to meet infection control needs—short-term and long-term:**

- Identify who in the organization may contact and expand the supply network. In a pandemic situation, facilities will use greater quantities of PPE, oxygen equipment, and isolation rooms than previously planned, and suppliers will experience service disruptions and delays.

- Implement PPE surveillance:

  - Conduct daily counts and update usage and reuse policies and protocols.

  - Measure days of supplies on hand and the days of utilization to which that translates.

  - Use predictive analytics to anticipate the needs for surges.

  - Use full-face respirators vs. N95 masks when safely applicable.

- Develop and implement long-term processes for continuously assessing PPE needs, including establishing clear communication channels and relationships with reliable vendors/suppliers for both short-term and long-term needs.

- Work with subject matter experts and conduct trainings to ensure clear, evidence-based guidance for the proper use of PPE and proper types needed for various settings to minimize unnecessary use of critical supplies.

- Develop and implement a process for reviewing PPE manufacturers' length of use, extended use, reuse, and decontamination protocols.

4 **Follow the CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) guidance, including:**

- Minimize the number of individuals who need to use respiratory protection through the preferential use of engineering and administrative controls.

- Use alternatives to N95 respirators where feasible.

- Implement practices allowing extended use and/or limited reuse of N95 respirators.

- Prioritize the use of N95 respirators for personnel at the highest risk of contracting or experiencing complications of infection.

- Develop and implement crisis standards of care for decontamination, referring to NIOSH guidance.

5 **Follow rigorous disinfection and cleaning protocols within the organization.**

- Reassure and train staff in cleaning protocols and products continually.

- Provide approved cleaning agents for the pathogen, adequate PPE, and instructions in a language understood by the environmental services staff implementing the protocol. Post instructions in easily accessible environmental services staff locations.

- Consider decontamination and sanitization methods that anticipate a broad range of pathogen transmission and longevity.

- Monitor room turnover times actively. Those recommended by the CDC will impact the availability of beds and create delays due to cleaning.

- Follow new methods for decontamination as they are rapidly evolving. The efficacy of alternative non-touch methods varies widely, so current recommendations by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are limited to identified surface disinfectants and manual cleaning in health care settings.

6 **Acknowledge that response requires a marathon mentality.** It involves long-term diligence using preventative strategies.

7 **Build and support the ongoing growth of internal infection prevention and control experts within your organization.** This is necessary to facilitate preparedness well before an emergency situation arises.

For more insight, download the whitepaper:
COVID-19 Lessons Learned: A Resource for Recovery by Deloitte & Joint Commission Resources.

To learn more about how JCR can provide support and guidance to help your organization's leadership teams with their infection control initiatives, visit us at https://www.jcrinc.com/products-and-services/advisory-services/infection-prevention-and-control/.

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